

THE
PEW
CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Philadelphia
Research
Initiative

POLL: PHILADELPHIANS INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT OVERALL LOCAL TAX BURDEN BUT WILLING TO PAY MORE FOR BETTER SERVICES

February 28, 2012

KEY FINDINGS

A new public opinion poll commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Research Initiative finds that Philadelphians are increasingly concerned about the overall local tax burden but many residents are willing to pay more in return for better services.

The poll also finds that Philadelphians favor the idea of commercial advertising at City Hall and other municipal properties in order to raise revenue, 56 percent to 34 percent, but are cool to taxing sugary drinks, with 46 percent in favor and 49 percent opposed.

As for the overall tax burden, 70 percent of residents call high taxes a "somewhat serious" or "very serious" problem in their neighborhoods, an increase from 62 percent last year and 55 percent in 2010. Fifty-four percent say they pay too much for the level of city services they receive, compared with 39 percent who feel they get their "money's worth" or a "good deal" for their tax dollars.

Even so, 49 percent say they would prefer to pay higher taxes for more city services as opposed to 42 percent who prefer lower taxes and fewer services. Residents were evenly split on this question in polls conducted the past three years.

The telephone survey was conducted between January 4 and January 19, 2012 among a citywide random sample of 1,600 residents age 18 and older. The three previous benchmark surveys were taken in January 2009, January 2010 and February 2011.

TAXES AND SERVICES

Residents have become increasingly concerned about the overall city tax burden during the last two years. When asked about problems in city neighborhoods, 70 percent described high taxes as a serious problem, with 40 percent calling it "very serious" and 30 percent "somewhat serious." A

year ago, 62 percent were concerned with high taxes, and 55 percent were in 2010.

This sentiment is felt most strongly by those with family incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (79 percent) and least strongly by those with family incomes over \$100,000 (51 percent).

As for how the value of the services they receive stacks up to the tax burden, 54 percent say they pay too much; 12 percent think they get their money's worth; and 27 percent feel they get a "good deal."

When asked to choose one of two options—more government services with higher taxes or fewer services with lower taxes—49 percent selected more services/higher taxes and 42 percent opted for fewer services/lower taxes. This is a change, although not a big one; in the past three years, respondents were essentially split on this question. (See Figure 1.)

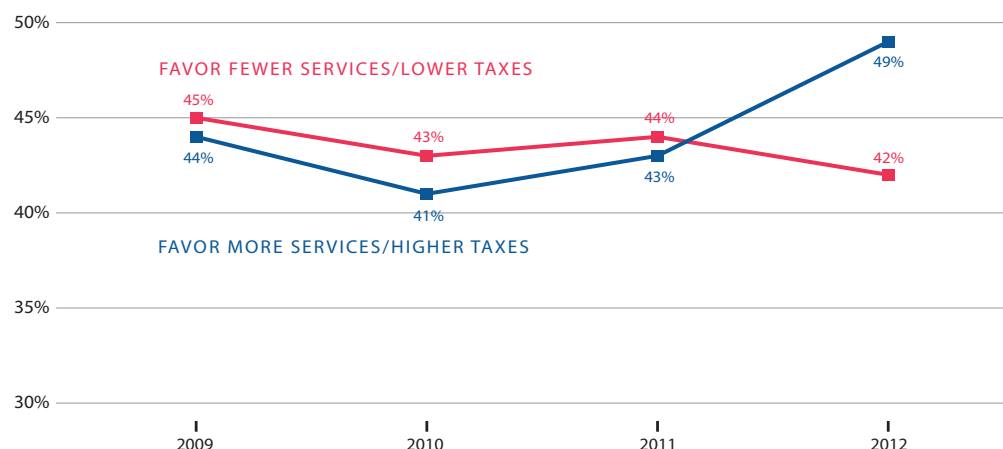
Those most in favor of more services tend to be those who can best afford them. Individuals with family incomes over \$100,000 are ready to pay more for additional services, 61 percent to 34 percent, as are college graduates, 58 percent to 31 percent. On the other hand, those less able to pay tend to be less interested in increased services. Residents with family incomes under \$30,000 back the fewer services/lower taxes option, 47 percent to 42 percent, as do people with a high school education or less, 48 percent to 42 percent.

The sections of the city most willing to accept higher taxes in exchange for improved services are West Philadelphia, 58 percent to 35 percent, and South Philadelphia, 52 to 38 percent. The areas favoring the fewer services/lower taxes option are Northeast Philadelphia, 51 percent to 43 percent, and North Philadelphia, 47 percent to 43 percent. For more details, see Appendix Table 1.

On another matter, Philadelphians are closely divided on whether newly hired city employees should get the same pension benefits as current workers and retirees, as is the case now, or whether the city should be able to give them lower benefits to save money. Overall, 47 percent say new hires should receive the same pension package, and 43 percent favor the alternative. This is essentially unchanged from last year.

FIGURE 1

CHOICE BETWEEN MORE GOVERNMENT SERVICES/HIGHER TAXES AND
FEWER SERVICES/LOWER TAXES



Hispanics favor the status quo on pensions, 54 percent to 35 percent, and blacks are similarly supportive, 53 percent to 36 percent. Whites say they would back a reduction in retirement benefits for new employees, 53 to 39 percent. People with family incomes under \$30,000 side with keeping retirement benefits the same for all, 50 percent to 40 percent, while those with family incomes of more than \$100,000 support lower benefits for new workers, 60 to 33 percent. For more details, see Appendix Table 2.

The ratings residents give to city services are largely unchanged from last year. Philadelphians have positive views on most services, with 74 percent describing their fire protection as good or excellent and 68 percent giving those descriptions to trash collection. But street repair and maintenance gets poor or “only fair” ratings from 73 percent of those polled, and the city’s criminal justice system from 67 percent.

Many Philadelphians are still unfamiliar with the city’s three-year-old 3-1-1 information system. A third of residents say they do not know enough about the service to evaluate it, or they declined to answer. Forty percent rate it good or excellent and 27 percent “only fair” or poor.

On another topic, Philadelphians continue to give low marks to the city’s public education system. Seventy-one percent describe the schools as poor or “only fair,” compared with 23 percent who think they are good or excellent. That is about the same level of approval as in the past few years but a slight decline from 2009, when 30 percent described the schools as good or excellent.

NEW REVENUE SOURCES

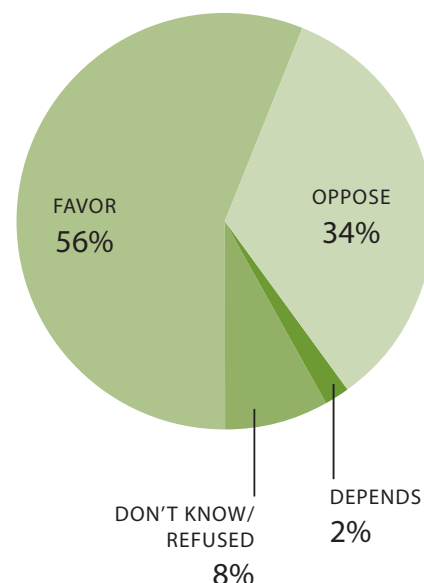
The Pew poll also examines Philadelphians’ views on two ideas for raising new city revenues—allowing commercial advertising on municipal property and imposing a tax on sugary drinks.

In January, City Council President Darrell Clarke introduced legislation that would permit advertising on city-owned property, including City Hall. In the poll, residents were asked whether they would endorse that idea “as a way to raise revenue.” Fifty-six percent said they favored it, and 34 percent were opposed. (See Figure 2.)

The strongest support for the concept comes from people age 35 to 49 and people with household incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000, both at 66 percent. The greatest opposition comes from people age 65 and over, with 43 percent of them objecting to the idea and only 37 percent supporting it. For more details, see Appendix Table 3.

FIGURE 2

ADVERTISING AT PHILADELPHIA CITY HALL AND
OTHER MUNICIPAL PROPERTY



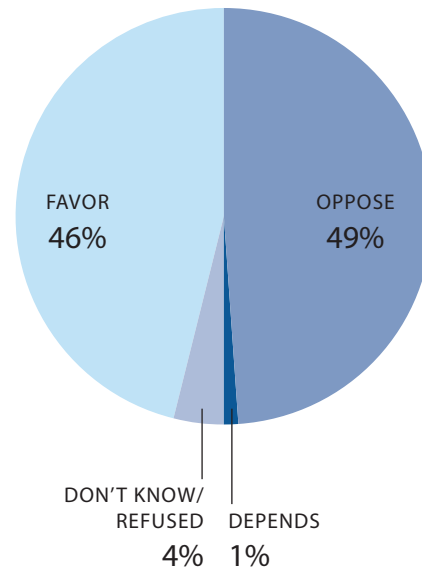
Philadelphians are less enthusiastic about paying added taxes on sugary drinks, an idea put forward by Mayor Michael Nutter twice in the past two years but not adopted by City Council either time. In the poll, residents were asked how they would react to such a tax “if city leaders said they need to raise more money.”

This proposal is sharply divisive. Forty-six percent are in favor and 49 percent opposed, with deeply held opinions on both sides. (See Figure 3.) Thirty-two percent are “strongly” in favor and 33 percent “strongly” opposed.

Whites support the idea of the drink tax, 54 percent to 42 percent. African Americans oppose it, 56 percent to 40 percent, as do Hispanics, 51 percent to 43 percent. Parents with children in the household reject the idea, 52 percent to 44 percent. People with household incomes over \$100,000 favor the tax, 60 percent to 36 percent, and people with household incomes under \$30,000 oppose it, 53 percent to 42 percent. For more details, see Appendix Table 4.

FIGURE 3

A TAX ON SUGARY DRINKS IN PHILADELPHIA



ABOUT THE SURVEY

The Philadelphia Research Initiative survey was conducted by telephone between January 4 and January 19, 2012, among a citywide random sample of 1,600 city residents, ages 18 and older. Interviews were conducted with 1,200 landline users and 400 cell phone users to reach a broad representative sample of Philadelphians.

The final sample was weighted to reflect the demographic breakdown of the city. The margin of error for the entire sample is approximately +/- 2.5 percentage points. The margin of error is higher for subgroups. Surveys are subject to other error sources as well, including sampling coverage error, recording error and respondent error.

Abt SRBI Public Affairs designed the survey and conducted all interviewing, working with Cliff Zukin, veteran pollster and professor of public policy and political science at Rutgers University.

This report was written by Susan Warner, officer, and Larry Eichel, project director of the Initiative, in consultation with Zukin.

ABOUT THE PHILADELPHIA RESEARCH INITIATIVE

The Pew Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Research Initiative provides timely, impartial research and analysis on key issues facing Philadelphia for the benefit of the city's citizens and leaders. Pew is a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. www.pewtrusts.org/philaresearch.

Table 1

		MORE GOVERNMENT SERVICES/HIGHER TAXES OR FEWER GOVERNMENT SERVICES/LOWER TAXES			
		More Services and Higher Taxes (percent)	Fewer Services and Lower Taxes (percent)	Depends (percent)	Don't Know/ Refused (percent)
Total		49	42	4	5
Race					
	White	50	43	3	4
	Black	49	41	4	5
	Hispanic	51	38	6	4
Education					
	H.S. or less	42	48	4	6
	Some College	55	39	3	3
	College Grad	58	31	5	5
Gender					
	Male	48	43	4	5
	Female	49	41	4	5
Years in Philly					
	10 or less	54	39	5	2
	11 to 30	53	42	2	3
	Over 30	46	43	5	7
Age					
	18-34	54	40	3	2
	35-49	50	41	4	5
	50-64	46	43	4	6
	65+	38	46	6	10
Household Income					
	<\$30,000	42	47	6	6
	\$30-\$50,000	55	39	2	4
	\$50-\$100,000	60	34	3	2
	\$100,000+	61	34	4	1
Neighborhood					
	South Philly	52	38	5	5
	West Philly	58	35	2	6
	North Philly	43	47	3	7
	N.W. Philly	48	40	5	7
	N.E. Philly	43	51	4	3
Children in Household					
	Yes	50	44	4	2
	No	48	41	4	7

Table 2

PENSION BENEFITS FOR NEWLY HIRED CITY WORKERS

		Should Get the Same Benefits (percent)	OK to Provide Lower Benefits (percent)	Depends (percent)	Don't Know (percent)
Total		47	43	3	7
Race					
	White	39	53	2	6
	Black	53	36	4	6
	Hispanic	54	35	4	8
Education					
	H.S. or less	47	43	3	8
	Some College	53	42	2	3
	College Grad	41	47	6	7
Gender					
	Male	43	46	4	6
	Female	50	41	3	7
Years in Philly					
	10 or less	41	48	4	6
	11 to 30	53	38	3	7
	Over 30	44	46	3	7
Age					
	18-34	52	39	3	6
	35-49	46	45	4	6
	50-64	44	48	3	5
	65+	40	46	3	11
Household Income					
	<\$30,000	50	40	3	6
	\$30-\$50,000	50	43	4	4
	\$50-\$100,000	41	49	4	6
	\$100,000+	33	60	3	4
Neighborhood					
	South Philly	45	44	4	7
	West Philly	52	42	1	5
	North Philly	52	40	2	6
	N.W. Philly	48	42	4	6
	N.E. Philly	43	46	4	7
Children in Household					
	Yes	52	42	3	3
	No	44	44	4	8

Table 3

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING IN CITY HALL AND OTHER CITY PROPERTIES

		Favor (percent)	Oppose (percent)	Depends (percent)	Don't Know/Refused (percent)
Total		56	34	2	8
Race					
	White	59	34	2	5
	Black	56	34	2	9
	Hispanic	60	28	3	9
Education					
	H.S. or less	55	34	2	9
	Some College	61	32	2	6
	College Grad	52	38	3	7
Gender					
	Male	57	36	2	4
	Female	55	32	2	11
Years in Philly					
	10 or less	53	38	1	7
	11 to 30	57	34	2	7
	Over 30	56	34	2	8
Age					
	18-34	58	33	2	7
	35-49	66	30	1	3
	50-64	56	34	2	7
	65+	37	43	4	16
Household Income					
	<\$30,000	54	37	2	7
	\$30-\$50,000	58	34	3	5
	\$50-\$100,000	66	26	1	7
	\$100,000+	49	45	2	4
Neighborhood					
	South Philly	53	36	3	8
	West Philly	54	38	1	7
	North Philly	56	32	2	9
	N.W. Philly	53	35	2	10
	N.E. Philly	61	30	1	8
Children in Household					
	Yes	63	28	1	8
	No	52	38	3	8

Table 4

TAX ON SUGARY DRINKS IF REVENUE NEEDED BY CITY

		Favor Strongly (percent)	Favor - Not Strongly (percent)	Oppose - Not Strongly (percent)	Oppose Strongly (percent)	Depends on how much (percent)	Don't Know (percent)
Total		32	14	16	33	1	4
Race							
	White	37	17	10	32	1	3
	Black	29	11	22	34	1	4
	Hispanic	33	10	16	35	2	4
Education							
	H.S. or less	26	12	19	36	1	5
	Some College	37	13	13	33	*	4
	College Grad	43	17	13	23	1	3
Gender							
	Male	32	16	16	32	1	3
	Female	33	11	16	34	*	5
Years in Philly							
	10 or less	44	16	16	19	1	3
	11 to 30	34	13	18	31	*	4
	Over 30	29	13	15	36	1	5
Age							
	18-34	34	14	18	31	*	2
	35-49	33	16	15	32	*	4
	50-64	31	11	17	35	1	5
	65+	29	12	12	36	3	8
Household Income							
	<\$30,000	29	13	21	32	1	5
	\$30-\$50,000	37	14	14	30	1	4
	\$50-\$100,000	35	17	10	34	*	3
	\$100,000+	47	13	14	22	*	3
Neighborhood							
	South Philly	35	17	16	28	1	2
	West Philly	29	15	16	34	*	6
	North Philly	28	11	25	29	1	5
	N.W. Philly	33	9	21	34	*	3
	N.E. Philly	32	11	11	40	*	5
Children in Household							
	Yes	31	13	19	33	*	5
	No	33	14	15	33	1	4

PHILADELPHIA RESEARCH INITIATIVE / ABT SRBI

TOPLINE FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS

January 4 – January 19

BASE= 1,600 Philadelphia Residents Except Where Noted

*Means less than 1%

Q. PLEASE RATE EACH AS IT APPLIES TO THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA.

LIBRARY SERVICES IN YOUR AREA (798 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	17%
GOOD	46%
ONLY FAIR	22%
POOR	10%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	6%

STREET REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE (798 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	3%
GOOD	23%
ONLY FAIR	35%
POOR	38%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	1%

THE 3-1-1 INFORMATION LINE (798 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	9%
GOOD	31%
ONLY FAIR	19%
POOR	8%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	34%

POLICE PROTECTION (798 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	10%
GOOD	40%
ONLY FAIR	33%
POOR	15%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	1%

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (798 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	4%
GOOD	23%
ONLY FAIR	34%
POOR	33%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	6%

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION (802 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	22%
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GOOD	41%
ONLY FAIR	25%
POOR	8%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	3%

FIRE PROTECTION (802 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	23%
GOOD	51%
ONLY FAIR	16%
POOR	5%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	4%

PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES (802 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	14%
GOOD	35%
ONLY FAIR	29%
POOR	20%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	3%

TRASH COLLECTION (802 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	17%
GOOD	51%
ONLY FAIR	23%
POOR	8%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	2%

THE AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES (802 RESPONDENTS)

EXCELLENT	21%
GOOD	39%
ONLY FAIR	23%
POOR	13%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	4%

Q. IN GENERAL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE JOB PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE DOING IN PHILADELPHIA—EXCELLENT, GOOD, ONLY FAIR OR POOR?

EXCELLENT	4%
GOOD	19%
ONLY FAIR	36%
POOR	35%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	6%

Q. IN GENERAL, IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN MORE GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND HIGHER TAXES, OR FEWER SERVICES AND LOWER TAXES, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

MORE SERVICES AND HIGHER TAXES	49%
FEWER SERVICES AND LOWER TAXES	42%

DEPENDS	4%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	5%

Q. THINKING ABOUT ALL THE SERVICES YOU GET FOR THE CITY TAXES YOU PAY IN PHILADELPHIA, WOULD SAY THAT YOU GET YOUR MONEY'S WORTH FOR WHAT YOU PAY?

GET MONEY'S WORTH	12%
PAY TOO MUCH	54%
GET A GOOD DEAL	27%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	7%

Q. IF CITY LEADERS SAID THEY NEED TO RAISE MORE MONEY, WOULD YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE A TAX ON SUGARY DRINKS?

FAVOR STRONGLY	32%
FAVOR NOT STRONGLY	13%
OPPOSE NOT STRONGLY	16%
OPPOSE STRONGLY	33%
DEPENDS	1%
DON'T KNOW	4%

Q. THERE HAS BEEN SOME DISCUSSION ABOUT ALLOWING COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING IN CITY HALL AND OTHER CITY PROPERTY AS A WAY TO RAISE REVENUE. DO YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE THIS IDEA?

FAVOR	56%
OPPOSE	34%
DEPENDS	2%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	8%

Q. DO YOU THINK NEWLY HIRED CITY EMPLOYEES SHOULD GET THE SAME PENSION BENEFITS AS CURRENT WORKERS AND RETIREES, OR IS IT OK TO HIRE THEM AT A LOWER LEVEL OF BENEFITS TO SAVE MONEY FOR THE CITY?

SHOULD GET SAME	47%
OK TO PROVIDE LESS	43%
DEPENDS	3%
DON'T KNOW	7%

Q. I'M GOING TO READ YOU A LIST OF PROBLEMS THAT SOME PLACES FACE AND WOULD LIKE YOU TO TELL ME WHETHER YOU THINK EACH IS A VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM, SOMEWHAT SERIOUS, OR NOT VERY SERIOUS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.

HIGH TAXES

VERY SERIOUS	40%
SOMEWHAT SERIOUS	30%
NOT VERY SERIOUS	26%
DON'T KNOW/REFUSED	4%